

## A NEW SWAMP SPARROW FROM THE MARYLAND COASTAL PLAIN

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The breeding of the Swamp Sparrow, *Melospiza georgiana* (Latham), on the Coastal Plain of Maryland was first suspected by Neil Hotchkiss, of the Patuxent Research Refuge, who believed that he heard the species singing in the Nanticoke River marshes during July, 1946, and again in May of 1947. Martin Karplus, Chandler S. Robbins, and Robert E. Stewart investigated this area on July 11, 1947. Of the thirteen adult Swamp Sparrows observed by them on that date, eight were singing males. One of these they collected, finding the testes enlarged. A statement published by Stewart (1947: 73) made clear the fact that the Maryland Coastal Plain was part of the breeding range of *Melospiza georgiana*.

That the one breeding example just referred to was much darker than breeding specimens of *M. g. georgiana* from New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia was readily apparent when it was first critically examined in 1947. Consequently, in the summer of 1950, the authors collected four more breeding adults in the same marshes from which the 1947 example was taken. The difference exhibited by this small series of five birds is so striking that we do not hesitate to describe them as new. They may be known as

### ***Melospiza georgiana nigrescens*, new subspecies** Coastal Plain Swamp Sparrow

TYPE.—Adult male, U. S. National Museum No. 418565 (Fish and Wildlife Service Collection); Wicomico County, Nanticoke River marshes, opposite Vienna, Maryland, June 24, 1950; collected by Gorman M. Bond and Robert E. Stewart (original number 120).

SUBSPECIFIC CHARACTERS: Similar to *Melospiza georgiana georgiana* (Latham) of the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada, but in breeding plumage the black streaking of the upper parts distinctly heavier, especially on the nape and dorsal region; feather edgings of the upper parts much grayer, less rufescent and buffy; tail and bill averaging darker; flanks noticeably less buffy. Seven specimens taken at Vienna, Maryland, in November resemble the new form in length of wing and tail, and we consider them representative of the breeding population of that area. These birds are similar to *M. g. georgiana* in comparable plumage but the brown of their upper parts is somewhat richer and darker, and the light edgings of their dorsal feathers are considerably less distinct. Similar also to the pale form, *M. g. ericrypta* Oberholser, of central western Canada and eastward, but in both breeding and

winter plumage feather edgings of the upper parts considerably narrower, not so whitish. General coloration of dorsal region even darker than when compared with the preceding race.

**MEASUREMENTS IN MILLIMETERS:** Adult male (three breeding specimens): wing (chord), 62.0–63.5 (63.0); tail, 59.0–61.0 (60.0). Adult male (four breeding specimens): exposed culmen, 11.0–11.5 (11.2); tarsus, 22.5–24.0 (23.2); middle toe without claw, 15.0–16.5 (15.6). Adult female (1 breeding specimen): wing (chord) 57.5; tail, 57.0; exposed culmen, 11.5; tarsus, 22.5; middle toe without claw, 15.0. Measurements of November birds are as follows: Male (four specimens): wing (chord), 62.5–63.5 (63.0); tail, 58.5–61.5 (60.5); exposed culmen, 10.0–10.5 (10.2); tarsus, 21.5–22.5 (22.0); middle toe without claw, 13.5–15.0 (14.3). Female (three specimens): wing (chord), 58.0–64.0 (60.3); tail, 54.0–57.0 (55.8); exposed culmen, 9.0–10.0 (9.3); tarsus, 20.0–21.5 (20.8); middle toe without claw, 14.0–15.0 (14.5).

Although the above measurements are based on a very small sample, they indicate that *nigrescens* may be slightly larger than the nominate race. Sixteen breeding *M. g. georgiana* from New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia measure: Male (eleven specimens): wing (chord), 60.0–64.0 (62.0); tail, 55.0–63.5 (59.0); exposed culmen, 10.0–12.0 (10.5); tarsus, 21.0–23.5 (22.1); middle toe without claw, 14.5–15.5 (15.2). Female (five specimens): wing (chord), 56.0–62.0 (59.1); tail, 52.5–56.5 (54.9); exposed culmen, 9.5–11.0 (10.1); tarsus, 21.5–22.5 (22.0); middle toe without claw, 14.0–15.5 (14.9).

**GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION:** Breeds in the Nanticoke River marshes, Wicomico County, across the river from Vienna, Maryland, and possibly also in other brackish tidal marshes where vegetation is suitable along the east shore of Chesapeake Bay in Maryland and Delaware. Present indications lead us to believe that *M. g. nigrescens* is resident in the Nanticoke River marshes. Breeding birds from southeastern New York, northern New Jersey, and southeastern Pennsylvania are darker than specimens from farther inland but are not as dark as the new race, and we consider them intermediate in color between *nigrescens* and *georgiana*.

**BREEDING SPECIMENS EXAMINED:** New York: Severance, 1 ♀. New Jersey: Overpeck Creek (near New York City), 10 ♂; Leonia, 2 ♂, 1 ♀; Newark, 1 ♂; Fort Lee, 1 ♂. Pennsylvania: Black Swamp, 1 ♂, 1 ♀; Somerset, 1 ♂, 1 ♀; Sugar Lake, 1 ♀; Sandy Lake, 1 ♂. West Virginia: Blister Run, 2 ♂; Cranberry Glades, 4 ♂, 1 ♀; Durbin, 1 ♂; Cranesville, 1 ♂.

**REMARKS:** Latham's description (1790: 460) of '*Fringilla georgiana*' was based on a migrant bird taken in Georgia. A check of all specimens in the collections of the Fish and Wildlife Service and the U. S. National Museum reveals that there are, in all, thirty eight examples of *M. g. georgiana* and thirty three of *M. g. ericrypha* from Georgia. This evidence that the two forms are equally abundant in Georgia clearly indicates that Latham could have had a

specimen of either when he described the species. The original description is too generalized for any conclusion as to which of these two races he was considering, but nothing about the description suggests that he was basing it on a specimen as dark as the Maryland Coastal Plain form. Of seventy-one Georgia specimens examined by us, none was representative of *nigrescens*.

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#### NEW LIFE MEMBER



Lawrence Irving Grinnell, a graduate of Harvard, retired from business in New York in 1938 to devote his time to ornithology. He received his Ph.D. from Cornell in 1947. He has studied and filmed birds widely throughout the United States, on the North Shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, on the west coast of Hudson Bay, and in Trinidad, Guatemala, Colombia, México (including Yucatán), and the West Indies. He has shown his films at numerous meetings ornithological and otherwise. His published papers include one on the bird life of Churchill, Manitoba, one on the nesting habits of the Redpoll (*Acanthis flammula*), and one on the nesting habits of the Lapland Longspur (*Calcarius lapponicus*). Always actively interested in outdoor pursuits, he has travelled over 7,000 miles on canoeing and high mountaineering expeditions. He has served as a vice president of the Appalachian Mountain Club.